

AN EXTRAORDINARY NIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, as we enter this Christmas season, there will be many children sitting down around the country listening to a story that begins, 'twas the night before Christmas.

I want to tell you about another night before Christmas that will be going on in the next week and has been going on for the last 20-some years. There is an extraordinarily tragic situation ongoing in a stunningly beautiful country in Africa, Uganda.

In recent weeks, a group of Rotarians from my district and surrounding areas went to northern Uganda with one item on their agenda: to advance the common good by providing polio vaccine and other assistance.

Ben Abe is a Ugandan from my district. He led this mission by the Rotarians, along with our former secretary of state from the State of Washington, Ralph Munro. They brought back an excruciatingly shocking and painful account of an extraordinary night where they observed firsthand a heinous tragedy that has been perpetrated on children in northern Uganda for years. It is only now beginning to see the light of day in mainstream media in publications like *Vanity Fair* and the *Smithsonian Magazine*. It occurs in Gulu in northern Uganda. Each night, a human mass moves through the pitch dark roads of Gulu. These are the night commuters. Not a late shift going to work, but a gigantic mass of thousands of children fleeing their unsafe homes, walking miles in the darkness to retreat behind locked gates in hopes of avoiding abduction, rape, disfigurement and, most horribly, to avoid being forced themselves to become the murderers of children as abducted child soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army.

Over 25,000 children have been abducted over the last 19 years; more than 21,000 children walk miles each night seeking a safe harbor. These young children seek sanctuary in tents, hospitals, warehouses and empty lots. They sleep piled up on each other, sometimes with a blanket but most often without, and they are separated from their mothers and fathers every night. Thousands of those Ugandan kids never make it to a safe haven.

Seventeen-year-old Daniel is an example. He is one of the boys abducted from school by the Lord's Resistance Army. One boy escaped but was caught. The rest were then forced to tie him to a tree and stone him to death. Daniel said, "That is what we did, because if we did not kill him, we would be killed."

Anna Grace was 11 years old when she was abducted. The Lord's Resistance Army forced her to march and carry someone else's baby. Then they threw a bomb at her, blowing off the

baby's head. Anna Grace was raped and gave birth to her own child in 2005.

Dave, 10 years old, was kidnapped in March of 2004 and watched as his two brothers were beaten to death with a log.

The only chance these night commuters have to reach safe harbor every night is to walk without adults, without protection, without light. The Rotarians from my district walked with these kids, moved with this mass of kids as they set out defenseless, in the deep darkness of night, seeking shelter to stay alive for just one more day.

The winner of the 2005 Sidney Peace Prize, Olara Otunnu, recently declared Uganda the worst place on earth to be a child today.

Though this despicable outrage has occurred for almost two decades, the Congress and the international community has not lifted a finger about what we proclaim is our duty, to protect children. There has been no dedicated international commitment or intervention to end this abhorrent situation. These Rotarians came back rightly incredulous over the international community's failure to mobilize and blunt this highly visible tragedy occurring every single night.

As Americans sit down and read that Christmas story, whether they read the one about the reindeer or the one about the baby Jesus coming to Bethlehem, these kids will be moving through the darkness. These Rotarians ask: How can this continue in a world where we proclaim our love and dedication to all children? They are right to ask these questions. Each night, that savagery hides in northern Uganda.

During this season of goodwill, this Congress and the entire national community must combine our collective strength to give some hope to these children, these night commuters, and their families. We can do better than we have.

If you believe, as I do that it is our utmost obligation to work toward a world safe for children, this obligation does not stop at our borders or oceans—all children are our children and we must act. The U.S. alone cannot break this outrageous nightly tragedy, but we can and must assert our political will, and insist that we meet it head on.

HONORING PRIVATE JON ABELS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. McCAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. McCAUL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a soldier and a hero from Pflugerville, Texas, and to pay homage to the sacrifices our fighting men and women make every day for America and for the world.

Last week, I had the honor of visiting Walter Reed Hospital where Private Jon Abels of the Army's 101st Airborne Division is receiving top notch medical care for the wounds he received in battle.

On November 29, Private Abels, who is a radio operator, was stationed in

Iraq and on patrol in Baghdad when his platoon came under fire from insurgents. Private Abels and his fellow soldiers managed to find cover and safety in an abandoned residence that was frequently used by the insurgents. Out-numbered 20 to 6 and trapped in a house, they tried to fight off the insurgents who were surrounding their position. Undoubtedly, many of the soldiers inside, if not all, would have been killed until Private Abels sprang into action.

Private Abels radioed for help and then found and hotwired the insurgents' truck in the house's garage. He then loaded his men in the truck, and they drove from the enemy's trap. As they left, they took on heavy gunfire that injured Private Abels and two others and, ultimately, killed three more as their truck crashed.

Injured and still in the range of the insurgents' fire, Private Abels helped the other survivors to safety and administered medical attention to his wounded platoon leader. His actions brought him and the other survivors just enough time for support fire to arrive, and ultimately, he saved three lives.

Last week, Private Abels proudly received his Purple Heart at Walter Reed Hospital and is making a quick and fast recovery.

Clearly a hero, Private Abels' actions exemplify the efforts of all of our fighting men and women in the war on terror. I was inspired by his optimistic attitude, even as a severely injured soldier at Walter Reed Hospital. He believes that we are getting the job done and making great progress in Iraq.

So as we stand together here this evening in peace, America's soldiers are united in protecting our country as they remain in distant lands fighting the threat and the horror of terrorism. We are there to root out the terrorists who wish to do us harm, who wish to harm Americans.

These terrorists, like the insurgents that Private Abels fought in Baghdad, have a track record of being patient until they succeed in their evil agenda, so we must continue to support our soldiers now more than ever and give our military men and women every tool necessary to protect us and to complete and to win this war on terror.

Some say that we should retreat in this war on terror, but to them I say that our fighting men and women have succeeded on all fronts. In places like Iraq and Afghanistan where oppression, tyranny and inhumane treatment once flourished, we now find nations waking up to the reality of self-ruled government and the benefits that come with their democracies. This success is most embodied by the free and democratic elections in Iraq that took place this very week.

To quit now would not only be an insult to those waging this liberating battle but a dishonor to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, their lives, for freedom and for the greater

good. Few causes are as worthy, and few prices are as great. America prides its freedom on how our determination can accomplish any task and defeat any foe. So finish the job we will. And because of heroes like Private Abels, I have no doubt in my mind that we will prevail.

DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, our soldiers need us, and they need the funding and the support that an appropriations bill can give to them and their families. Not only the soldiers that are on the frontlines of Iraq and Afghanistan, but the many soldiers returning home and the enlisted personnel stateside along with their families.

The Defense appropriations bill will provide a salary increase long overdue or at least needed again in these very difficult economic times. The bill will also provide and enhance improved health care for our soldiers. And recognizing that all Americans look forward to prosperity and a better way of life, I can assure you, in visiting with soldiers and families in my district, the limitations of their health care cries out for repair.

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Soldiers and their families are on limited opportunities for diverse health care, hospitals are limited, the care is limited; and certainly for those families who have elderly parents or dependents, family members who are ill, children who need health care, our soldiers' compensation and a bad health plan is a bad mixture for America.

And so I would ask the conferees, as they make their way in gathering and moving this legislation to the floor, remember the people who need the Defense appropriations bill. It is not filled with politics, because those of us who have raised our voices for redeployment, peace, and a better way in Iraq still understand the importance of providing for our men and women in the United States military.

This time around the Defense appropriation will be more than just the anchor for our military; it will be the anchor for those who have lost greatly in this last year. This will be the anchor for the Katrina survivors. And anyone who has interacted with them knows that they are not deadbeats. They are Americans who are simply looking not for a handout but for a helping hand.

Thousands live in the 18th Congressional District in the city of Houston, and I applaud the mayor and the council members and other elected officials; and I applaud Americans in general for the outpouring of their generosity, and particular Houstonians. But we need your help. We need your help in helping

FEMA continue its funding of apartment contracts that were supposed to be for 12 months and 18 months, otherwise we will see Katrina victims, their families and children dumped into the streets.

We need the funding to continue to provide hotel compensation until February 7 or longer, or we will see Katrina survivors dumped into the streets. When I use the word "Katrina," I really mean Americans, for the American Federal Government should be the safety net for all Americans in time of trouble. If we do not have the funding that we should have, we will see Katrina survivors stranded throughout America, 44 different States where they are located, with a one-way ticket to those States and no return ticket home.

FEMA will provide that ticket with the continuing funding for them to return home to their States. Now we understand that Defense appropriations will have 527s, issues dealing with campaign funding. That is not a Defense bill. We also find out that in addition to the Katrina resources, we will be putting the development and the expiration of ANWR.

Many of us are disagreeing with that. We believe in energy development, but we are disagreeing with going into ANWR, because we believe it has not been proven that that is a source of energy, other than, of course, an enhancement and opportunity for Alaska, one State. We applaud them for that, but there are many other resources that can be utilized to keep energy prices down.

We can explore in the gulf. It has not been explored to the extent that it should be, and there is a welcoming attitude about the exploration in the gulf, not only for energy oil but also for gasoline or gas.

Let me also say that there are still districts in the city of Houston that are in great need of the funding that is in this bill. In the city of Houston, Houston Independent School District spends \$186,000 a day for the additional visitors, or students, from Louisiana and Mississippi.

We are in debt \$30 million. We have 5,000 students. We welcome them. We want to teach them. We want to help them, but we need the support that is in this Defense appropriations bill. We want this bill to come to the floor, and certainly what we want most of all is to be able to have a free-standing bill to help our soldiers, our veterans to give them good health care, good housing, and good support.

We want to be able to be the safety net for all Americans in time of tragedy, provide for the Katrina survivors, the Wilma survivors, the Rita survivors to be able to have school in the place where they do not live; and we want most of all to be able to have housing and the travel trailers to get where they have to go.

Let us get the bill on the floor. Let us do what America needs us to do. Let us provide a safety net for America.

OPPRESSION IN BELARUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the ongoing oppression in the country of Belarus. On October 16, the Belarusian people celebrated a day of solidarity with political prisoners, activists, their families, independent journalists, and all who fight for freedom and democracy.

Many people switched their lights off at 8 p.m. and lit candles to show hope for a free and democratic future for Belarus. Unfortunately, only 2 days after this historic event, a prominent correspondent of the opposition newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*, Vasil Hrodnikau, was found dead in his home.

According to family members, Mr. Hrodnikau was murdered for his fearless striving to bring a fair press to the Belarusian people. It is time for the U.S. Congress and our European allies to make a definitive statement on Dictator Alexander Lukashenko's policies and actively support the opposition movement in the region.

I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to take a closer look at the atrocities occurring daily in Belarus and work together to do what we can to bring about democratic elections for the Belarusian people.

In the European edition of *Time* magazine, in an article titled, "Where Tyranny Rules," which highlighted the fate of Nikolai Statkevich, a political dissident who ran for president against Lukashenko in 2001, since 2003 he has been in jail for resisting the authorities and obstructing traffic.

Two years for resisting authorities and obstructing traffic. And he still resides in jail today. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. Every year thousands of Belarusians are jailed for minor infractions, for example, attempting to publish newspapers, and regularly face police harassment.

Another good example occurred last August when Belarusian KGB, yes, they kept the infamous Soviet institution's name to intimidate civilians, the KGB raided the apartments of several college youths who had e-mailed each other cartoons involving Lukashenko. These students now are facing many years in prison.

Imagine that: prison terms for e-mailing political cartoons. As cochairman of the House Baltic Caucus, it is my sincere hope that the United States will continue to remember those fighting daily for democracy in Belarus and do all that we can to support this movement, the movement for change in this region.

I am encouraged by the change in the international community in support of democracy for Belarus. I encourage all of us to work together to keep up the great work and keep a watchful eye on the nation of Belarus and its dictator,